

Written evidence submitted by Impetus

## Education Select Committee inquiry

**Impetus** transforms the lives of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds by ensuring they get the right support to succeed in school, in work and in life. We find, fund and build the most promising charities working with these young people, providing core funding and working shoulder-to-shoulder with their leaders to help them become stronger organisations. In partnership with other funders we help our charities expand and we work to influence policy and decision makers so that young people get the support they need.

As a charity which supports young people from disadvantaged backgrounds – defined by those receiving free school meals or pupil premium – this submission will consider this group. We acknowledge that this group intersects with other vulnerable groups such as pupils with special educational needs and children in need and should not be viewed in isolation. However, all disadvantaged groups require, and deserve, distinct measures to address the individual barriers they face in the current crisis and, as such, this defined group will be the focus of this submission.

We want to preface our responses to the specific questions asked by the Committee by saying that in our experience, the response to COVID-19 by the education sector has been largely positive and something we should be proud of. We've been inspired by the tremendous efforts of our charity partners to rapidly adapt what they do to meet current needs; whether it's Magic Breakfast delivering thousands of meals to hungry children, Football Beyond Borders launching a virtual school, Action Tutoring, the Access Project and The Tutor Trust moving tutoring online or IntoUniversity and Resurgo picking up the phone to thousands of students just to check they are ok. The response from teachers and schools, and the engagement of MPs, officials and Ministers has been incredible given the conditions everyone is working in and we'd like to mark our recognition of these efforts, including by the Committee itself which moved quickly to launch this important inquiry.

### **Key recommendations**

For limiting the effect of cancelling formal exams:

- Ofqual should set a threshold for the maximum change in the attainment gap that reflects acceptable and likely normal variation. Should the grade awarding process lead to greater change in the attainment gap than this threshold, Ofqual must take additional steps to bring the change in the attainment gap within the threshold.
- Support for the current exam cohorts should be a very early priority for partial school re-openings.

For supporting apprenticeship providers:

- Clearer, good practice guidance and funding should be provided from government to enable work mentors to play a more crucial role in reducing the isolation effects of the COVID-19 crisis on young apprentices from disadvantaged backgrounds.

For mitigating the impact on disadvantaged groups:

- We strongly recommend the government continues to work with our charity partner Magic Breakfast to ensure children from lower-income households do not go hungry.
- We recommend that the Department for Education supports and guides schools to enable them to offer the direct support to parents that is needed to encourage home learning.
- We strongly recommend a National Tutoring Service to provide extra support to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to maintain their learning during school closures and to catch up and help close the pre-existing attainment gap once schools reopen.
- To fund measures to support catch-up, we recommend the DfE introduces an enhancement of the pupil premium to enable schools to access well evidenced programmes for disadvantaged students when they return to school, and for a repository of such programmes to be compiled so that teachers can more easily navigate the many external programmes vying for their attention.
- We recommend recognition, support and funding for some of the vital work being done by external providers to support schools and teachers, whether it is delivering food or books or tech to disadvantaged students, providing online tutoring or supporting vulnerable children in and out of school.

For supporting the resilience of the sector:

- We recommend charities who are offering well evidenced, high impact support to children are supported to deliver these programmes where they are most needed.

### **The effect of cancelling formal exams, including the fairness of qualifications awarded and pupils' progression to the next stage of education or employment**

1. We are concerned about the approach to qualifications for current year 11 and year 13.
2. As we have communicated to Ofqual in response to their consultation, their current proposals do not protect students from being systematically disadvantaged; and they do not provide students with the grades that they would most likely have achieved had they been able to complete their assessments in summer 2020.
3. Evidence from the last decade suggests that the attainment gap between different socio-economic groups is broadly stable. For example, the difference

between FSM pupils, and their better-off peers, in the percentage of pupils achieving grade 4/C or above in English and maths GCSEs: this has been consistently within a 1.5 percentage point range for the last 9 years, with an annual variation over 0.6 percentage points only twice in that time.

4. There is no evidence to suggest that this year would have seen a significant change in this attainment gap, had exams gone ahead. Therefore, any fair grading process must also result in a similar attainment gap.
5. As it stands, Ofqual's proposals do not necessarily guarantee this fair outcome. The evidence about possible teacher bias is mixed, and this is an unprecedented situation. It may well be that the process outlined does result in a normal variation in the attainment gap between disadvantaged young people and their better off peers.
6. But if it does not, Ofqual must be prepared to step in. Ofqual should set a threshold for the maximum change in the attainment gap that reflects acceptable and likely normal variation. Should the grade awarding process lead to greater change in the attainment gap than this threshold, Ofqual must take additional steps to bring the change in the attainment gap within the threshold. If this cannot be done without modifying of centre-provided rank orders, Ofqual must be prepared to do so.
7. It may well be that Ofqual addresses these concerns, which we know are shared by the Fair Education Alliance and the Social Mobility Commission among others.
8. These measures are particularly important for qualifications young people need for progression to the next stage of education, such as GCSEs in English and maths for progression to level 3 study; and level 3 qualifications used to access higher education. One of the most important objectives should be to support young people to make the same transition to the next stage of their life as would have been possible had they sat the exams.
9. In an ideal world, young people who wish to would have an opportunity to sit exams, and get their results, early enough to allow a normal transition for the new academic year. Exams sat by relatively small numbers of young people in relatively large sports halls will likely be deliverable while observing social distancing measures. For this to happen, dates need to be confirmed as one of the first priorities when schools begin a partial opening, when the government says it is safe to do so.
10. Alongside this we hope that providers of further and higher education will show extra flexibility over entry requirements for grades awarded in this academic year. Providers will already need to think about extra transitional support for young people who have had their education disrupted, and these measures should be able to support young people whose awarded grades are slightly lower than would normally be required to access a specific course.

11. Whenever the opportunity to sit exams arises, there is a question about what teaching and revision support is available to young people in advance. Disadvantaged young people are particularly likely to be reliant on teachers and resources from schools to succeed with their revision. For example, many schools would normally offer revision sessions in the Easter holidays, and optional sessions during study leave.
12. The government and schools/colleges will need to work together to plan how an appropriate level of support could be provided to students. This will look different depending on the broader activities that schools and colleges are also engaged in (i.e. how much regular teaching is going on). We would suggest that support for the current exam cohorts should be a very early priority for partial school re-openings. There seems to be more focus on the next exam cohorts, the current years 10 and 12. Our current exam cohorts must not be overlooked.

### **Support for pupils and families during closures, including:**

#### **The consistency of messaging from schools and further and higher education providers on remote learning**

13. As we hope to make clear throughout this submission, pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds require tailored support, and therefore tailored messaging. Some providers, for reasons such as the proportion of pupil premium students they work with, are more prepared and resourced to offer this than others.

#### **The effect on apprenticeships and other workplace-based education courses**

14. From our charity partners, we know that there are a lack of new apprenticeship opportunities available at the current time, which is impacting the routes available to young people. We understand that some youth-focused providers have put most new apprenticeship opportunities on hold until September, meaning that young people who would have taken this route into employment are unable to at present.
15. However, an even wider concern facing the apprenticeship market is how to support employers to create apprenticeship opportunities for young people leaving school and college this summer during the crisis. Setbacks in doing so will have a detrimental impact on both the supply of young people and future employer demand, with potentially damaging long term repercussions.
16. With many apprentices now on furlough, some employers are narrowing their areas of work to specific tasks, which makes the observation of 'live skills' across the breadth of criteria more difficult. This is less problematic on some apprenticeships such as Business Administration where regular conversations can be held with employers to plan the work carried out by apprentices, but it is much more difficult for apprenticeships with teaching standards which cannot be observed because of social distancing.

17. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who are with smaller training providers are more likely to be denied or have reduced access to technology and WIFI connectivity to continue their learning in a reliable and consistent way. Larger training providers have greater resources to supply young people with the technology they need to carry out learning virtually. Some smaller providers may lack this resource, which disproportionately impacts both them and their learners.
18. In a remote working environment, young people are less likely to have the opportunity to learn positive work practices from working alongside more experienced colleagues. For some line managers, adjusting to the new ways of working may mean that interaction, coaching and support reduces and they spend less time on developing their apprentice's behaviours, which is a critical aspect of apprenticeships. Young people who would benefit the most from face to face contact in off the job learning are more likely to be further isolated and miss having a structured work environment to help overcome or relieve the challenges they might face at home.

**The financial implications of closures for providers (including higher education and independent training providers), pupils and families**

19. The financial implications of the crisis will vary depending on the type and size of the apprenticeship provider and the types and ages of the cohorts of learners being supported. For smaller apprenticeship providers working with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, there is a question over the sustainability of apprenticeships in a virtual world given the overall negative impact on social mobility. A first step to improving social mobility could be for clearer, good practice guidance and funding from government to enable work mentors to play a more crucial role in reducing the isolation effects of the COVID-19 crisis on young apprentices from disadvantaged backgrounds.

**The effect on disadvantaged groups, including the Department's approach to free school meals and the long-term impact on the most vulnerable groups (such as pupils with special educational needs and disabilities and children in need)**

20. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds are at an inherent disadvantage when learning from home. They lack access to resources needed to engage with learning at home and experience lower levels of parental engagement. School closures therefore have an immediate, more severe impact on a disadvantaged pupils' learning environment, risking the widening of the attainment gap between them and their better-off peers.
21. There is an immediate concern regarding pupils receiving free school meals - 1.3 million children prior to school closures. The free school meal voucher scheme is a welcome start but has not been without issues: those who are eligible not being reached, delays in the implementation of the scheme and difficulties accessing the vouchers. Limitations of eligible supermarkets has

impacted most those without access to private transport and including high-cost options fails to recognise the realities of free school meal provision.

22. We also wish to highlight the reality that lunch is not the only meal pupils from lower-income households rely on schools to receive. Our charity partner, Magic Breakfast, works with schools to provide healthy breakfasts and expert support to ensure no child is too hungry to learn. They have continued to do incredible work, undertaking the logistics of delivering in lockdown and working with corporate partners to continue delivering thousands of breakfast packages each week. We strongly recommend the government continues to work with Magic Breakfast to ensure children from lower-income households do not go hungry at any time of the day.
23. Access to virtual learning is vital for those less likely to have their own resources and parents actively engaged in home-tutoring. Students in disadvantaged groups are much less likely to have access to devices and therefore cannot easily access the online learning being provided by their schools, Oak National Academy and the BBC, however commendable these efforts.
24. Our charity partner, IntoUniversity, works with disadvantaged students via local community centres, which are now shut. They [surveyed](#) a selection of their students on their home-learning environment. Just under half reported that they did not have access to a personal laptop or PC, and less than half of have a proper place to study, making it incredibly difficult for them to engage with online learning.
25. Whilst the Department of Education's initiative of providing laptops to specific groups is a welcome start, we would like to see the programme scaled to reach more children in need. We should also recognise the reality that access to a suitable space to learn in is as much an issue as access to devices. Our charity partner, Football Beyond Borders, is actively engaging the parents of their participants as well as the young people themselves in recognition of the pivotal role the entire home environment plays in learning. We recommend that the government supports and engages schools to enable them to engage and support parents to encourage home learning.
26. Prior to the crisis, the attainment gap was already 28.7%pts. We expect this gap to widen rapidly and severely, negating a decade of modest progress. We do not see any evidence for the view that disadvantaged pupils will "quickly bounce back" following a return to school without the necessary support.
27. Learning loss can affect all pupils, but disproportionately impacts those from disadvantaged backgrounds due to the limitations of their home environment. Evidence shows that in some aspects of learning, such as reading, disadvantaged students lose approximately 1.5 months where their better-off

peers gain 2.3 months. This gap will be greatly exacerbated by the abrupt, extended school closures. This is not a gap which can be quickly closed.

28. We strongly recommend the creation of a National Tutoring Service to provide extra support to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to maintain their learning during school closures and to catch up and help close the pre-existing attainment gap once schools reopen. Evidence shows that tutoring can boost a student's progress by up to three months, and we consider well targeted, high quality tutoring to be one of the most effective ways to reduce learning loss in disadvantaged students during school closures, and help them catch-up once schools return. We've been working positively with partners and officials to explore options for rapidly expanding tutoring provision and we're pleased to fund and support three high quality tutoring providers who are set to do all they can to support government efforts to address the challenges of the current crisis.
29. To fund both this and other measures to support catch-up, we recommend the DfE introduces an enhancement of the pupil premium to fund well evidenced programmes for disadvantaged students when they return to school, and for a repository of such programmes to be compiled so that teachers can more easily navigate the many external programmes vying for their attention.
30. We recognise that the DfE will need to think creatively about a programme to repair the damage being done by the current disruption, and therefore we recommend support from external providers as a critical factor in supporting the teaching workforce to achieve this.

### **What contingency planning can be done to ensure the resilience of the sector in case of any future national emergency**

31. On the whole, the education sector has shown admirable resilience given the circumstances. Most schools have managed to stay open for key worker children, and teachers have done incredible work rapidly adapting to serving different groups of children with different needs and in different settings.
32. Across the education sector, schools seem to be faring better than early years providers, colleges and universities, many of whom face cash flow problems and financial uncertainty. It is too soon to tell how many of these providers will not survive the crisis but it is unlikely these parts of the system will remain unscathed.
33. This is bad news for the early years providers, colleges and universities which may not survive, and the young people who rely on them.
34. However, this moment of crisis presents an opportunity to build a national education infrastructure that offers all children the opportunity of a good education from early years through to further and higher education. If we don't take a system-wide perspective, it is the children from disadvantaged

backgrounds, already falling further behind due to school closures, that will suffer the most.

35. Two thirds don't get their GCSEs at 16 and are not well served by the current system. We need a solid 'through-to-18' system with universal, high quality early years and FE provision which sits on a solid financial footing; an adequate pupil premium at every age; a well-supported teaching profession for all settings; and access to the additional targeted support that children need if they fall behind. Some of the best additional support is provided by charities, who are also in a precarious situation during school closures and it is essential that we don't lose these providers either.
36. Where charities are offering well evidenced, high impact support to children to do well at school, they should be supported to deliver these programmes where they are most needed. Schools have to navigate a labyrinth of external providers of variable quality and it is not easy for teachers to identify the best, value-for-money interventions. We would be happy to work with the Committee, the Government and other stakeholders to come up with a system which better recognises and rewards impact, and scales proven programmes so we get more children the essential qualifications and life skills they need to succeed.

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